

# From Parchment to Pictures to Pixels

## Balancing the Accounts: Ernest Lindgren and the National Film Archive, 70 Years On

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Historical Column

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**Editor's Note:** *The following is the text of a keynote address delivered by the author at the Society of Archivists Annual Conference in Norwich, UK, on Thursday 8 September 2004. The author joined the National Film Archive as Television Acquisitions Officer in 1959, and became Deputy to Ernest Lindgren in 1963. He left the Archive in 1965, and succeeded Lindgren as Curator of the National Film Archive in 1974.*

It is 70 years since the National Film Library (now known as the National Film and Television Archive) was founded. Together with the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, the Cinémathèque Française, and the Reichsfilmarchiv, it was one of the first film archives, as we know them today.



David Francis during his farewell speech at the CNAFA meeting in Monterrey, Mexico, March 2001.

The founder of the National Film Library was not a film collector like Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque, or a film critic like Iris Barry of the Museum of Modern Art. He was an English Literature graduate who had joined the British Film Institute (the National Film Library's parent body) as Information Officer a year before the Library was founded. His view of a film archive was very different from his colleagues in New York, Paris, and Berlin. Today his approach would be considered appropriate, but at the time it was criticized, because he would not permit unique archival prints to be projected, and was more concerned with the long-term survival of the collection than its short-term accessibility. In those days, there was no money to make screening prints, so you either projected the originals or considered them preservation masters.

Henri Langlois, on the other hand, was happy to show the treasures he had acquired to other film enthusiasts, even though this endangered their long-term survival. Among these enthusiasts were film critics of the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, some of whom later became key film directors in the French "Nouvelle Vague" movement. They regarded Langlois as a hero. Unfortunately, there were no well-known film enthusiasts in the United Kingdom prepared to defend Ernest Lindgren's more rational approach to film archiving. Luckily this did not deter Lindgren from painstakingly building an archival infrastructure

*Ce texte est une communication faite le 8 septembre 2004 devant la Society of Archivists d'Angleterre à l'occasion de sa conférence annuelle. Entré au National Film Archive en 1959 en tant que responsable des acquisitions télévision, l'auteur devint l'adjoint d'Ernest Lindgren de 1963 à 1965 ; il réintégra le NFA en 1974 pour y succéder à Lindgren à titre de Conservateur.*

David Francis s'attarde d'abord sur la biographie d'Ernest Lindgren. Contrairement aux autres pionniers de cette génération (Henri Langlois, le collectionneur, Iris Barry, la critique), le fondateur du National Film Library (première appellation du National Film and Television Archive) ne venait pas du cinéma : diplômé en littérature, il était entré au British Film Institute en tant qu'agent d'information, un an avant la création du National Film Library. Sa conception d'une institution consacrée aux archives cinématographiques étaient de ce fait fort différente de celle de ses collègues de Paris et New York. Si cette approche paraît maintenant fort pertinente, il n'en était pas ainsi à l'époque et on critiquait notamment l'interdiction de projeter les copies de conservation, Lindgren étant davantage soucieux de sauvegarder la collection pour les générations futures plutôt que de la rendre accessible dans l'immédiat. Étant donné l'absence de budget de tirage, il fallait alors projeter les originaux ou décider de les considérer comme éléments de conservation.

Henri Langlois, lui, n'hésitait pas à projeter aux cinéphiles de son entourage les films qu'il avait acquis, au risque de mettre en péril leur conservation à long terme. Les critiques des *Cahiers du cinéma* (qui seraient bientôt les cinéastes de la Nouvelle Vague) faisaient partie des cinéphiles bénéficiant des largesses de Langlois dont ils firent un héros. Malheureusement il n'y avait pas en Angleterre de cinéphiles aussi prestigieux et prêts à défendre les positions de Lindgren ; ce qui ne l'empêcha pas de tenir bon et de bâtir une infrastructure capable d'assurer la conservation à long terme des collections, une infrastructure qui par la suite servit de modèle à de

that would guarantee the long-term survival of his collection and become a model for other film archives throughout the world.

In the last 70 years there have been several books extolling the virtues of Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française, but almost nothing has been written in praise of Ernest Lindgren, his brilliant preservation officer Harold Brown, and the achievements of the National Film and Television Archive, as it is now known. I hope what follows will help redress the balance a little.

The importance of the cinema as a record of 20th-century life was recognized soon after the Lumière Brothers projected films to a paying audience in the basement of the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris on 28 December 1895. In fact it was less than three years later that Polish cameraman Boleslaw Matuszewski published a pamphlet in Paris entitled "Une nouvelle source de l'histoire". In it, he not only foresaw the value of film as a primary source material in the study of history, but he suggested that his proposed film archive should be attached to an organization like the Bibliothèque Nationale, so that it would have "the same authority, the same official existence, and the same possibilities as the other recognized archives". Unfortunately, no one took up his suggestion.

There were similar proposals in the United Kingdom. In the *Optical Magic Lantern Journal Annual* for 1899, a writer for the magazine *Truth* is quoted as saying that "a kind of national gallery should be started for the collection of all public events like last year's Jubilee". Seven years later, the *Optical Lantern and Kinematograph Journal* asked, "Will the day ever come when makers of bioscopic records will have to send two copies to the British Museum, two copies to the Bodleian Library and so forth...so that you will be able to go and see, years and years later, ... incidents happening." In fact, the magazine was a little behind the times, because in December 1896 Robert W. Paul, the British pioneer filmmaker, had offered the British Museum several of his films, including *The Derby*. Surprisingly, the Museum accepted his offer, and deposited the films in their Prints and Drawings Department.

There is endless discussion about which organization should be regarded as the first film archive. The Library of Congress in Washington, DC, could make a strong case. It received frames from Edison's Kinetoscopic Records, photographically printed on card, as early as August 1893, and continued to receive copies of films printed onto 35mm paper until around 1917, although the number of films thus deposited decreased significantly when the 1912 Copyright Act recognized the cinema as a medium in its own right, not just a succession of photographs, and required the deposit of a copy of the film as distributed rather than just a record of it. The Library decided not to retain film copies after 1912, presumably because they were on flammable nitrate stock and a liability in a national collection of historic paper materials. It did not start collecting films systematically again until the late 1940s, and therefore cannot be considered the first film archive because of this significant break in continuity.

A stronger case can be made by military archives in countries like the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. The Imperial War Museum

nombreuses archives du film un peu partout à travers le monde.

Sensible au fait que plusieurs ouvrages ont été consacrés à Henri Langlois et à la Cinémathèque française et presque rien à Ernest Lindgren et à Harold Brown, son brillant responsable de la conservation, pas plus qu'au travail du National Film and Television Archive, David Francis s'attache à rétablir l'équilibre des choses en remontant à l'origine du mouvement des archives du film et en y situant les idées et les réalisations de Lindgren.

Après avoir évoqué les premières expériences institutionnelles en Suède, en Allemagne 'au Danemark et aux États-Unis, l'auteur évoque la création de l'Imperial War Museum et, un peu plus tard, suite aux travaux d'une commission gouvernementale, du British Film Institute (1933). Et c'est dans ce décor qu'apparaît l'élégant Ernest Lindgren dont les allures de bureaucrate cachent une passion réelle pour les grands cinéastes européens de l'époque muette. Le numéro d'été 1935 de la revue *Sight and Sound* publie un premier texte du jeune Lindgren : « A National Film Library for Great Britain. »

L'auteur passe ensuite en revue les différentes démarches de Lindgren pour faire admettre les responsabilités particulières de la nouvelle institution dont il a la garde, signalant au passage ses préoccupations techniques très pratiques (notamment des règles précises gouvernant la copie des films) qui devancent de plusieurs années la publication, en 1965, du premier « Manual of Film Preservation » de la FIAF.

Suit un long passage consacré à l'arrivée aux côtés de Lindgren du jeune Harold Brown dont la curiosité et le génie inventif vont marquer en profondeur le travail de conservation du NFA et avoir une influence considérable sur deux générations de techniciens, à l'étranger autant qu'en Angleterre.

La construction des entrepôts de conservation du NFA est aussi un héritage du tandem Lindgren-Brown et David Francis y consacre plusieurs pages, comme il le fait avec le célèbre (et souvent mis en cause) test de

Department of Film, for instance, can claim a continuous existence since 1919, when the War Office made it the official repository for war films. One of the first titles deposited was *The Battle of the Somme*, recently accepted for inclusion in the UNESCO "Memory of the World" initiative.

Scandinavia also played an important early role in the development of film archives. The Danes like to claim that they invented film archiving through the work of Anke Kirkeby, who in 1899 commissioned Peter Elfelt, the official court photographer, and Øle Ølsen, founder of Nordisk Film, to make documentaries about places and people in Copenhagen, with the idea of donating the results to the state as the basis of a film museum. Also, it was in neighbouring Sweden that the first film archive devoted to the cinema as an art form was set up in 1933. Its founder, Einar Lauritzen, passed away only last year, a fact that makes one realize how young the film archive movement is. His archive is not generally regarded as the first because it was then a private organization.

Two years later, in 1935, the first public film archives were established in London, New York, and Berlin. These are generally accepted today as the first film archives. The Cinémathèque Française was founded a year later, in 1936.

### The need for film archives

Why did it take so long to recognize the need for film archives? Although some people saw the importance of film as a record of contemporary life, few regarded the cinema as an art form. Hollywood had taken great pains to make the public aware that it was in the business of entertainment and simply giving the public what it wanted. The studios felt that if the cinema was considered an art form it might drive the public away from the box office.

There is also another possible reason. Those who knew something about the history of the cinema probably wondered whether there would be many films available to collect. In the first decade of the cinema, films were sold outright. Producers were happy for the purchasers to sell them on or show them in less populated areas for smaller entrance fees. The cinema was young, and they felt the more people who could experience its joys, the better it would be for their business. There are a comparatively large number of films around from this period, but the copies are so worn that they are hardly worth saving.

After 1908, films were rented. This meant they were returned to the distributor after use. The prints were looked after better because they were assets from the distributor's point of view. However, the long-term survival of the films was totally in their hands. Normally, as soon as there was no longer a demand for a given title, the emulsion was stripped from the base and the silver reclaimed. By 1915, the era of the short film was almost over, and both the producers and the distributors emptied their vaults to make way for feature-length films. The same thing happened in 1928-29 with the coming of sound. Silent features had no further commercial life, and were once again shipped off to the film-strippers.

We know now that a large number of films did survive as a result of confusion, sloth, or the enthusiasm of the private film collector, although *A Study on the Current State of Film Preservation in America*, undertaken

vieillesse mis au point par Londres. Suit un long passage sur les rapports entre le National Film Library et le British Film Institute, un sujet qui sera fréquemment d'actualité.

Textes à l'appui, David Francis examine ensuite les positions de Lindgren sur les questions déterminantes que sont la sélection dans la constitution des collections et le catalogage dans la mise en valeur de ces collections – règles de catalogage promulguées dès le début des années 40, alors que rien de tel n'existait ailleurs dans le monde.

L'activité de Lindgren écrivain est également décrite et illustrée par de nombreux exemples, de même que sa position, si souvent mise en cause, dans le débat éternel au sein des archives du film entre conserver et montrer.

Enfin l'auteur s'arrête un long moment sur l'activité multiple de Lindgren au sein de la FIAF, de sa présence active au Comité directeur aux débats historiques qui l'opposèrent à Henri Langlois, un homme qu'il estimait et avec qui il avait étroitement collaboré.

on behalf of Congress by the Library of Congress, and published in 4 volumes in June 1993, showed that in some years, particularly between 1910 and 1915, only around 10 percent of the titles produced still exist.

### **The National Film Library**

How then did the National Film Library in the United Kingdom come into existence? In 1929, a Commission on Educational and Cultural Films was established by the unanimous vote of some hundred educational and scientific organizations attending a conference organized by the British Institute of Adult Education. The Commission's terms of reference were, among others, "to consider suggestions for improving and extending the use of films for educational and cultural purposes"; "to consider methods for raising the standard of public appreciation of films"; and "to consider whether it is desirable and practicable to establish a permanent central organisation with general objects as above".

The focus was clearly educational, and the Commission's researches showed that Britain was the only major country that did not already have a central body to undertake objectives like these. It is therefore not surprising that their main conclusion, which appeared in a published report in 1932 called *The Film in National Life*, was "That a National Film Institute be set up in Great Britain financed in part by public funds and incorporated under Royal Charter".

The proposed Institute would have a Board of Governors appointed by the Government. The Governors would be required to set up an Advisory Council which included representatives of "learned and scientific societies, educational associations and education authorities and the film industry". Although most of the functions of the Institute outlined by the report were educational by nature, number 6 required the Institute "to be responsible for film records, and to maintain a national repository of films of permanent value".

As a result of the Commission's report, the British Film Institute was founded on 30 September 1933. Its Memorandum and Articles of Association required it, in Article (f), "To develop the National Film Library to form a comprehensive collection of significant films; to arrange for the loan and exhibition of films from such a Library, and generally to evolve facilities for individual and group study of films and the showing of special programmes."

### **Enter Lindgren**

Ernest Lindgren joined the Institute as Information Officer in 1934. He had a degree in English Literature, and like Iris Barry, the Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, and Henri Langlois, the Director of the Cinémathèque Française, he believed the art of the cinema was vested in the great European film directors of the silent cinema. However, unlike Langlois and many of the other founders of the European film archives, he was not a film collector. Always immaculately attired and charming, Ernest seemed at home in the role of a bureaucrat.

Ernest must have been named Librarian of the National Film Library before the Board of Governors decided to establish the Library at their May 1935 meeting, because in the summer issue of *Sight and Sound*, which

normally appeared in June, he wrote a long article entitled "A National Film Library for Great Britain". According to Penelope Houston in her 1994 book *Keepers of the Frame*, the Library Committee was also formed before May. According to Houston, the Committee wanted to acquire all films, because "any kind of selective system must be unsatisfactory. Every film has a historical value of some kind". Ernest himself was of the same opinion at the time, because he quotes in his article a statement made in 1932, probably by the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, that "the Film Institute, within the limits of what is technically and financially possible, would preserve for record a copy of every film printed in England which had possible documentary value...."



Ernest Lindgren and Ove Bussendorf during the FIAF Congress in Antibes in 1953.

The Board of Governors of the Institute had asked the British Kinematograph Society to set up a Special Committee "to consider means that should be adopted to preserve Cinematograph Films for an indefinite period". The findings of this Special Committee were published in BFI Leaflet No. 4, dated August 1934. We know that the Committee had five meetings, and that they considered the topic important. It is unlikely, therefore, that these meetings took place over less than a three-month period. They must have started their considerations in May 1934 at the latest. It has always been assumed that Ernest was behind this initiative, but as he had not been named Librarian of the National Film Library at this point it may not be the case. Perhaps the Governors decided to make the

request to the British Kinematograph Society soon after their inaugural meeting in October 1933 because they were concerned about the cost implications of setting up a National Film Library.

Anyway, this Report outlined the technical considerations that have governed film preservation ever since. The members of the Committee were Simon Rowson, the President of the BKS; Dr. G.R. Davies, appointed by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research; J.A. Hall, appointed by the National Physical Laboratory; Cecil Hepworth, the pioneer filmmaker; F.R. Renwick, from Selo; Capt. J.W. Smith; W.R. Webb; and I.D. Wratten from Kodak Ltd.

In Section Two of their Report, they favored a system "which will preserve the pictures at their present dimensions on transparent film support". The group regarded the photographic image as permanent, providing certain precautions were taken during its preservation. However, they felt that the cellulose (nitrate) base was much more liable to deterioration "because of the chemical reactions which take place between the vapours it gives off", as in Section Eight they say "chemists are agreed that safety film is in itself a more stable material in the sense that it is less liable to spontaneous disintegration. It is also believed to be less likely to have a harmful effect upon the photographic image by the generation of deleterious gases, and, because it is inflammable only to a slight degree, it needs no special precautions against fire." Section Ten urges "that films intended for preservation for a long period should

be produced on safety film". The Committee, however, recognized in the next Section that one may not be able to afford to copy all existing nitrate films onto safety film, and that one would therefore have to store nitrate films on a long-term basis.

In Section Twelve, the Report states that it is "highly desirable that the temperature in the store shall be kept as low as possible above actual freezing point. A temperature of not less than 33 degrees Fahrenheit or more than 40 is recommended. When a film is taken out of a vault the process of warming should be permitted to take place gradually over several hours." The next section states that "the film should be wound, gelatin outwards in lengths of not more than approximately one thousand feet each, on cores not less than two inches in diameter made from inert non-corrodible material, e.g., bakelite, compressed paper or non-ferrous metal and contained in boxes of similar material."

The films should be stored in separate containers, in vaults "where the air is properly conditioned so as to have a moisture content of approximately 50% humidity and a temperature variation of not more than plus or minus five degrees at 60F". Films thus stored should be taken out and examined every five years. If there are signs of deterioration in a positive, a negative should be made from it. However, "at each duplication something of the quality of the original is necessarily lost."

Section Eighteen states, "it is important that films deposited for storage should never be used for projection". Finally, and most remarkably, the last section says, "in order to ensure the best possible photographic quality after successive duplications the following must be observed. Firstly, acetate duplicating positive or duplicating negative stock should be used according to whether a positive or negative print is being made. Secondly, the contrast of the image must be kept below that which is customary in prints used for ordinary projection. Finally, very high or very low densities must be avoided in order to secure as nearly linear reproduction as possible." Why is this last section remarkable? Well, at the time stock manufacturers were not producing either duplicating positive or duplicating negative stock on a safety base.

FIAP did not produce *Film Preservation. A Report of the International Federation of Film Archives*, the basis of what later became its *Manual of Film Preservation*, until 1965, and as far as I know no other archives except the Imperial War Museum Film Department and the National Archives in Washington had even thought about such preservation issues.

### **Enter Harold Brown**

Now that the Archive knew how to look after its collection, it had to find a Technical Officer to put these recommendations into practice. Ernest took on a young man named Harold Brown, who was an office boy at the Institute. He had only joined the organization because his wife was a typist there. He had no technical knowledge, but was willing to learn, so he went to a local cinema, the Forum, and was taught by the projectionist how to make joins and inspect film. Harold Brown later became one of the world's greatest experts on film preservation. Sensibly, Lindgren formed a Technical Committee to advise the Library on preservation issues. One of its key members was I.D. Wratten of

Kodak, one of the group which produced the 1934 British Kinematograph Society Committee Report described above.

By 1952, Harold Brown felt confident enough to read a paper before the British Kinematograph Society on the "Problems of Storing Film for Archive Purposes". This covered such issues as nitrate fires, the nature of decomposition, ideal storage conditions, the artificial ageing test, duplication for preservation, tinting and toning, colour fading, the storage of safety film, and the removal of residual hypo. Although

Kodak and the British Kinematograph Society had undertaken research into many of these subjects, this was the first occasion on which a film archivist had brought all the information into one place and prepared a vade-mecum for archival preservation. This article and other documents prepared by Harold Brown eventually became the basis for the FIAF *Manual of Film Preservation*.

In the 1960s Harold produced another definitive paper, "Notes on Film Examination by the Identification of Copies", which he presented at the FIAF Congress in Berlin in the DDR in June 1967. Herbert Volkmann, the first Head of the FIAF Preservation Commission, was Director of the film archive there. This document explained how one reads a film, and shows how much information can be obtained from a film through a visual examination. FIAF eventually published an expanded version of this work in 1990, under the title *Physical Characteristics of Early Films as Aids to Identification*.

Another of Harold's great talents was patience. He was prepared to spend endless time explaining technical matters to young archivists, and his

workshop on Basic Film Handling at the 1983 FIAF Congress in Stockholm is still remembered today. He brought with him from the National Film Archive, as it was then known, three staff members to demonstrate, using basic tools and equipment, how a young archive could look after its collection with next-to-no resources. The Workshop was so successful that two years later its recommendations were published by the FIAF Technical Commission.

Harold had developed these techniques because the Archive was situated in a village outside London, and the only labour available was unskilled. In fact, the staff responsible for repair and basic film handling were the wives of local factory workers. The choice of work in Aston Clinton was either the National Film Archive; Oriole Records, which made 78s for Woolworth's; or a sausage-skin factory. Luckily the Archive was the cleanest and most desirable employer. Harold was actually pleased that this staff did not have film industry experience, because those who did often had a short-term view of film and handled it in a way that no archivist could contemplate.



Harold Brown in Lausanne, November 1991.

Harold, therefore, had to reduce everything to its lowest common denominator. The headings in his *Basic Film Handling Manual* include chapter headings like “How to open film cans”; “How to remove a film from the can”; “Recording data from a can that is to be discarded”; “Winding”; “Control of film while winding”, etc. Let’s look in more detail at the chapter on “Repair”, the most time-consuming operation in an archive: “There are two aspects of repair. One is of a practical mechanical nature, the aim of which is to ensure, as much as possible, the safe passage of the film through the printing machine. The other is what can be described as a cosmetic repair. For example, if a wide and dirty join exists, it may be capable of passing through a printer, but it is going to show on the screen. To remedy this the splice is taken apart, made narrow, cleaned, and rejoined so that it is as inconspicuous as possible.”

Harold also knew the Archive could not afford equipment as well as salaries, so he reduced all repair operations to the lowest common denominator. For example, after separating an old join “the overlap should be narrowed by cutting with scissors, and the joining surfaces cleaned by lightly scraping with a sharp knife, a razor blade, or scissor blade”. He continued, “To re-join, place the two pieces, emulsion down, on a thickness of several sheets of paper on the bench, with the two ends overlapping in the position in which they are to be joined. The two pieces can be kept in position by placing a weight on each.” This meant that no film joiners were required. The pieces of paper, incidentally, were there to stop drips of film cement getting on the bench. His *Basic Film Handling Manual* has proved a godsend to developing archives, particularly those with cheap labour but no funds for importing equipment.

Harold had the same approach to duplication. Although in the early days he assumed most duplication would be done by commercial laboratories, he realized that many early films in the Archive would not run through the kind of continuous contact printers used by the industry. The Archive had to have something more flexible, which would cope with shrinkage levels in excess of 2%, and would allow him to print one frame at a time if necessary. In the end, Harold built his own printer. It was originally designed to duplicate Lumière films, which had different-shaped perforations than Edison films, for Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française. The two archives were apparently not always at one another’s throats.

It was an optical step printer made out of his old Meccano set, elastic bands, and sprockets from an old 35mm showman’s projection outfit. This was probably the first printer built specifically for archival use. Not only could it copy Lumière films, it could handle significant shrinkage, buckled film, even large-format film like that used in the Prestwich camera. There is no doubt that Harold thus saved many films that would otherwise have been lost for posterity. Later archives could afford to purchase old commercial printers like the Debie Matipo, which could do many of the same things, but Harold’s work on the duplication of damaged and deteriorating film enabled them to modify such machines to provide maximum flexibility. The Archive also duplicated all its films onto 35mm acetate stock after March 1949.



### **The question of film storage**

Both Ernest and Harold had to put their heads together to address the question of film storage. Initially they kept all the films at the Institute's Great Russell St. headquarters, but when war was imminent the government insisted that all inflammable film be removed from the Greater London area. Initially the collection was personally moved by Harold to a barn in Rudgwick in Sussex. However, Ernest wanted a purpose-built home for the collection. Eventually he came across a relatively new house, with a series of old farm buildings attached, in Aston Clinton, about 35 miles from London.

He immediately built a series of vaults inside the farm buildings. Each chamber held about 500 reels of nitrate film, and was kept between 33-40 degrees Fahrenheit, with a relative humidity of around 40%. It was important that the decomposition gases were permitted to escape. The cans were therefore not tightly sealed, and were stored flat. Each chamber had an individual vent, which allowed the gases to dissipate into the outside air. In the chimney was a hinged cover that would blow open if there were an explosion or a build-up of pressure in the vault. There was no connection between neighbouring vaults, so fire could not spread from one to another. There were corridors right round the vaults to insulate them from the external environment. Nitrate vaults are still constructed this way today.

Harold even looked into the idea of having individual storage drawers for each reel of nitrate film, a method of storage used by the National Archives in Washington, in an attempt to ensure that rather than losing the entire contents of a vault in the event of a fire, only the reel affected would be destroyed. Unfortunately, this system proved too expensive for a collection of the Archive's size in the early 1950s.

### **The artificial ageing test**

Although most of the National Film Archive's technical recommendations were followed by other archives around the world, there was one recommendation that came in for a lot of criticism. This was the artificial ageing test. Everyone knew that nitrate film, the film stock used by the commercial film industry until 1951, was not only highly flammable, but it was also prone to chemical decomposition. Unfortunately, the decomposition was not linear. A film could look fine one day, and be a sticky unprojectable mass 6 months later.

It was not until 1942 that the Archive first experienced this situation. Soon after, Mr. C. Smith of the Kodak Research Department designed an artificial ageing test using litmus paper as an indicator. The test was further refined by Mr. S.A. Ashmore of the Government Laboratory, a member of the Archive's Technical Committee. To put it in simple terms, the test depends upon the controlled acceleration of decomposition by the application of heat. A disc of film one-quarter of an inch in diameter is punched out of a frame in the reel and put into a test tube. The tube is closed with a stopper, around which is wrapped filter paper impregnated with an indicator dye. The tube is then heated in an air bath to 134 degrees. The number of minutes it takes for the bottom part of the filter paper to turn red is then recorded. If this doesn't happen in an hour, the

film should be retested in 3 years. Any film that shows a result in less than 20 minutes is regarded as unstable, and must be copied immediately. If there is a result in less than 40 minutes, it will need to be tested again in 6 months, and if between 40 and 60 minutes, in a year. In 1951, a total of 1,143 films were tested, and 5.6% were found to be unstable.

There were clearly some logistical problems with a test like this. It was very labour-intensive, and it did involve cutting small discs out of the film itself. It was no good doing this from a leader or even a title, because these, as they had been cut in, could easily behave differently from the film itself. There was no direct correlation between the time it took for the filter paper to be bleached and the potential life of the film. It merely showed that injurious gases were being given off. Nevertheless, if you could not afford to copy many films each year, it was a way of choosing the films that appeared to need copying most quickly.

Ernest's enemies, Henri Langlois and his supporters, like James Card of George Eastman House, picked on the "holes" that the National Film Archive cut out of the films it was testing as evidence that Ernest didn't like nitrate films. It became a joke that any film coming from the Archive was full of holes. In fact, Harold used to print the holes in when films were transferred to safety stock because he did not want to lose the information on the frame. Langlois was further incensed by the fact that the Archive destroyed the nitrate originals after a new acetate duplicate had been made and quality controlled. His criticism was more justified here, although nitrate originals were not being destroyed when I joined the Archive staff in 1959. Nowadays archives don't destroy originals after duplication, because while the original can still be copied there is always a chance that duplicating stocks will improve, printers get better, or even that a new medium will be invented which can retain more of the information on the original film. Of course, any form of criticism from Langlois was not taken very seriously by Ernest, because he felt Langlois did far more damage by projecting unique nitrate prints or destroying them in fires, a rather common occurrence at the Cinémathèque.

### **The British Film Institute**

The most important functions of the National Film Institute envisioned in *The Film in National Life* were (1) "to act as a national clearing-house for information on all matters affecting the production and distribution of educational and cultural films"; (2) "to influence public opinion to appreciate and demand films which, as entertainment, are really good of their kind or have more than entertainment value"; and (3) "to be responsible for film records, and to maintain a national repository of films of permanent value". The organization was to have a Royal Charter, with a Board of Governors appointed by the Government, and be financed in part by public funds.

When the British Film Institute was incorporated on 30 September 1933, its Articles and Memorandum of Association and structure were significantly different. The film trade had made certain that it would not be allowed to get involved in censorship, and would not be able to take actions that would put pressure on the industry to produce different kinds of films. To ensure that the Institute did not get involved in trade

matters, they resisted the idea of the Royal Charter, and insisted that the first three members of the Board of Governors were elected by the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association, the Kinematograph Renters Society, and the Federation of British Industries. These three Governors, plus three representing the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, then co-opted three other Governors to represent the public interest, and finally all Governors co-opted the Chairman. In effect, this meant that nothing could be done which the industry objected to. The funding was to come from the Cinematograph Fund, which had been set up under the 1932 Sunday Entertainments Act. Its funds were generated by a 5% tax on Sunday cinema attendance.

The Commission on Educational and Cultural Films called on the British Film Institute "to develop the National Film Library to form a comprehensive collection of significant films; to arrange for the loan and exhibition of films from such a Library; and generally to evolve facilities for individual and group study of films and the showing of special programmes".

The first question the Library faced was how to build a collection. Certainly, it was not going to refuse donations at this stage in its development. At the same time Ernest, who was a logical and pragmatic man, realized that he would never be able to preserve everything he acquired, and that a film archive was not going to attract the same level of public funding as the major museums or the British Library. Some form of selection was clearly necessary. I don't think he ever thought about the inherent problems associated with selection, such as how can one foresee what scholars will want to see in the future, or whether an archivist, or even a selection committee appointed by an archivist, should be the sole arbiter of what films should form part of a national collection.

As far as I know, the National Film Archive was the only film archive that took such a formal approach to selection, and over the years it has come in for a lot of criticism from colleagues who were not so brave. However, at a time when Ernest Lindgren and Harold Brown were the only staff members, and the Archive was trying to establish itself in a world that did not appreciate the importance of film either as an art form or as a record of contemporary life, it was an understandable decision.

Later, when the Archive acquired a larger staff, and had separate acquisitions officers for feature films, documentaries, and television programs, Ernest realized that he did not need to put so much reliance on the Selection Committees, and that more of the decisions could be made by the staff themselves, who were more knowledgeable in their respective fields than the members of the Selection Committees. In fact, well before that policy change was implemented, staff made their own recommendations, and the Committees' job was largely to approve or reject them. Committee members could of course make their own proposals, and did, but their main role was to give validity to the selections made by staff. Ernest saw the Selection Committees as a kind of protection for a young, under-funded, and under-staffed archive. The members of the Committees were respected experts in their own fields, who would come to the support of the Archive if its selection or acquisition policies were challenged. Also, it would be justifiable to

*Este texto es una comunicación del 8 de septiembre de 2004 ante la Society of Archivists inglesa, en su conferencia anual. El autor ingresó en el National Film Archive en 1959 como responsable de las adquisiciones televisivas; fue adjunto de Ernest Lindgren de 1963 a 1965 y en 1974 regresó al NFA como sucesor de Lindgren en el puesto de conservador.*

David Francis se extiende sobre la biografía de Ernest Lindgren. Éste, contrariamente a otros pioneros de su generación (Henri Langlois, el coleccionista; Iris Barry, la crítica) no provenía del mundo del cine: con su diploma de Literatura había entrado en el British Film Institute (actualmente National Film and Television Archive) como agente de información, un año antes de la creación de la National Film Library. Por eso, sus ideas sobre una institución dedicada a los archivos de cine eran muy distintas a las de sus colegas de París y Nueva York. Aunque ahora su actitud pareciera muy acertada, no lo era en su tiempo, cuando se criticaba, en especial, la prohibición de proyectar copias de conservación, pues Lindgren se preocupaba más por salvaguardar su colección para las generaciones futuras que por hacerla accesible en lo inmediato. Como no disponía de presupuesto para sacar copias, tenía que decidir entre proyectar los originales o considerarlos como elementos de conservación.

Por su parte, Henri Langlois no tenía dudas en proyectar para los cinéfilos de su entorno las películas que adquiriría, con el consiguiente riesgo de poner en peligro su conservación a largo plazo. Los críticos de los *Cahiers du cinéma* (quienes en poco tiempo serían los cineastas de la Nouvelle Vague) aparecían como cinéfilos que se beneficiaban de la generosidad de Langlois, de quien hicieron en un héroe. Desgraciadamente, en Inglaterra no había cinéfilos tan prestigiosos dispuestos a defender las posiciones de Lindgren, a pesar de lo cual perseveró y creó una estructura capaz de asegurar la conservación de las colecciones a largo plazo, infraestructura que sirvió como modelo a muchos archivos filmicos del mundo.

ask the government for money to purchase selections that had been validated by well-known independent experts.

### **Lindgren's views on selection**

Ernest's views on selection were interesting. In a pamphlet published by the British Film Institute in July 1935, entitled *The National Film Library, Its Work and Requirements*, he wrote, "a National Film Library cannot fully fulfill its function by confining itself solely to British films; it should seek to make available in this country the best work of all nations irrespective of country of origin". He continued, "the analogy here is with such an institution as the National Gallery: were this confined to British paintings, it would lose immeasurably in value". In a 1941 pamphlet entitled *The British Film Institute: The National Film Library, Its Policy and Needs*, Ernest saw three reasons for selection. Firstly, "to make the collection representative of the art of the film"; secondly, "to provide historians of the future with their raw material"; and thirdly, "to record the life and habits of the present day, such as our taste in clothes, houses and food, our mannerisms, our accents, our turns of speech, and in so doing to throw light on our changing ideals and social outlook." He felt that all films shown in the United Kingdom should be considered because they had an impact, however transitory, on the audience's cultural life. He thought the American cinema in particular was important because it had more impact on British audiences than their own cinema.

The other archives at the time, except specialist organizations like the Imperial War Museum Film Department, were only interested in the art of the film. Ernest was unique in recognizing the importance of the factual film. Even more remarkable was his recognition in 1941 that film historians might consider film as raw material in the study of history. Few historians even today use film as source material in their researches. Ernest thought carefully about the criteria used in the selection of factual film: "A film should not be selected if the material it contained could just as easily be recorded in another form such as a book. It was only of value if movement added to the appreciation of the subject matter. If photographs would serve the same purpose, then it should not be selected. Again, it should not be selected if it could easily be filmed again in future." Historical reconstructions were for the most part rejected, but he encouraged leniency when considering films that recorded commonplace behavior.

Soon after the Library was established, Ernest set up a General Sub-Committee to advise the National Film Committee on the films it should acquire for preservation. The Sub-Committee was impressive. In 1944, it included film critics Dilys Powell and Jympson Harman; C.A. Walker, trade film reviewer for *Today's Cinema*; Forsyth Hardy, former film critic of *The Scotsman*; Ivor Montagu, filmmaker and Eisenstein scholar; Simon Rowson, Chairman of the British Kinematograph Society; Miss Hussy (identity yet to be established; she may have been Secretary to the Committee); Thorold Dickinson, the well-known British director; William Farr, from the Ministry of Information; Hugh Carleton-Greene, later to become Director-General of the BBC; and Rodney Ackland, scriptwriter and author. The Committee met once a month, and went through the month's releases of feature films, shorts, and newsreels. Voting never

Sensible al hecho de que varias obras fueran dedicadas a Henri Langlois y a la Cinémathèque française y prácticamente nada a Ernest Lindgren y Harold Brown, su brillante responsable de conservación, como tampoco al trabajo del National Film and Television Archive, David Francis trata de restablecer el equilibrio remontándose al origen del movimiento de los archivos filmicos, en el que coloca las ideas y los logros de Lindgren.

Después de evocar las primeras experiencias institucionales en Suecia, Alemania, Dinamarca y Estados Unidos, el autor se explaya sobre la creación del Imperial War Museum y, posteriormente, del British Film Institute (1933). Es éste el contexto en que aparece el elegante Ernest Lindgren cuyo aspecto de burócrata escondía una verdadera pasión por los grandes cineastas europeos de la época del cine mudo. El número de verano de la revista *Sight and Sound* publica un primer texto del joven Lindgren: «A National Film Library for Great Britain.»

Luego el autor pasa revista a las diligencias realizadas por Lindgren para que se reconocieran las responsabilidades específicas de la nueva institución a su cuidado y de paso indica sus prácticas preocupaciones técnicas (en especial, las reglas para la copia de películas), bastante anteriores a la publicación, en 1965, del primer *Manual of Film Preservation* de la FIAF.

Sigue un largo pasaje dedicado al joven Harold Brown, cuya curiosidad y genio inventivo marcarían profundamente el trabajo de conservación del NFA y tendrían una influencia considerable sobre dos generaciones de técnicos, en el extranjero y en Inglaterra.

La construcción de los depósitos de conservación del NFA también forma parte de la herencia del tándem Lindgren-Brown, y David Francis le dedica varias páginas, como también al célebre (y a menudo discutido) test de envejecimiento perfeccionado en Londres. Luego relata las relaciones entre la National Film Library y el British Film Institute.

Recurriendo a los textos como pruebas, David Francis analiza luego

took place. If a minority made a strong case for a particular title, that was enough. Ernest realized that the selection process was imperfect, and that it was better to select a film that had relatively little support than confine it to oblivion.

As the Archive grew, new Selection Committees were set up. The Science Committee was formed in 1943. This was followed in about 1946 by a History Committee. The original Selection Sub-Committee changed its name to the Art and Entertainment Committee. The latter added television to its brief in 1954, but surrendered this responsibility to a Television Committee in 1961.

The problem with Ernest's selection system was that few of the films selected were actually acquired. Only in the case of feature films and newsreels were there surplus copies at the end of their release that could be made available free of charge to the Archive. There was no money for many years to make copies. Ernest insisted that the experts on the Selection Committees give a reason for each selection. In an article in the *Journal of the Society of Film and Television Arts*, No. 30, Spring 1970, a special issue devoted to the work of the National Film Archive, Ernest gave some examples, which included: "for sensitive direction, treatment of the theme of loneliness and the performances of the leading players"; "for the light it throws on contemporary attitudes to war"; "as a sympathetic unsensational portrait of drag-queens"; "as an excellent record of the art of Margot Fonteyn". As Ernest says, the Committees were required to give reasons "to force our selectors to justify their choices, to provide a basis for discussion if opinions differ and a basis of agreement" which the majority of the Members could support.

Inevitably, some of the decisions seem a little embarrassing today. Clyde Jeavons, in his excellent paper "Selection in the National Film Archive", observes that "it took the General Selection Committee three attempts to recommend *Gone with the Wind*". Some changes were made after Ernest died in 1973. Thereafter, the Archive selected all British features, because if it did not preserve them nobody else would. Historical reconstructions were judged on the basis of whether they accurately recreated the historical situation they were depicting, and the soundtrack on newsreels, which Ernest thought added nothing to the pictures, was retained because it reflected the contemporary attitude to the scenes being portrayed.

### Cataloguing

Ernest also led the way in establishing a system of cataloguing films. *Rules for Use in the Cataloguing Department of the National Film Library*, produced in the 1940s, was the first such document anywhere in the world. In 1952 the Library of Congress produced a preliminary edition of its *Rules for Descriptive Cataloguing in the Library of Congress: Motion Pictures and Filmstrips*. The National Film Library issued a revised edition of its *Rules* in 1952, reflecting some of the Library's recommendations. Further editions were published in 1954 and 1956, and UNESCO used both the National Film Library and the Library of Congress *Rules* in 1954 in the preparation of its *International Rules for the Cataloguing of Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Films and Filmstrips*.

las posiciones de Lindgren sobre cuestiones decisivas como la selección para la constitución de las colecciones y la catalogación para su valorización, gracias a reglas promulgadas en los años 40, cuando en el mundo no había aún nada parecido.

También la actividad de Lindgren como escritor es descrita e ilustrada con numerosos ejemplos, así como su posición, tantas veces discutida, respecto del debate, eterno en los archivos filmicos, entre conservar y mostrar.

Luego el autor se detiene sobre las múltiples actividades de Lindgren en el marco de FIAF, desde su presencia activa en el Comité directivo hasta las discusiones históricas que lo opusieron a Henri Langlois, a quien estimaba y con quien había colaborado estrechamente.

Why were cataloguing rules so important for film? If a researcher receives the wrong book from a librarian, it presents no great problem. The book gets very little more wear, and anyway in most cases there are plenty of other copies around. If you have a single copy of a film and you only allow researchers three viewings, it is vital that they only look at material they really need to see. The only way you can ensure this is to catalogue the subject of the film in detail. This is a time-consuming process. A book is catalogued by author, and has most of the information a cataloguer needs on the title and contents pages. One has to view a film all the way through before one can produce a satisfactory subject entry. Also, it has no clearly defined author. Books normally have title pages. Films often have no identification at the beginning.

Ernest saw film cataloguing as a three-stage operation. When a film is acquired, one drafts a provisional entry from information that is readily available on the film itself, the can, or associated paperwork. A knowledgeable researcher might be able to decide on a film's relevance from such an entry, but most users won't be able to. Then comes the full catalogue entry, which can only be written after a detailed viewing and possibly a lot of additional research. Finally comes the printed catalogue. Before the days of computers, one could only make the existence of a film known to a researcher who did not have the opportunity of coming into the Archive when a published catalogue was available. It is of course important that catalogue entries are consistent, and that they use standard descriptive terms with accepted meanings.

Incredibly, the National Film Library published its first catalogue one year after its foundation, in September 1936. The Introduction states, "in this catalogue only a broad classification of films has been attempted. Where it has been possible to assign the date of production either from titles given on the film itself or by reference to contemporary trade journals this has been done." Somewhat strangely, silent films were classified as being either "early films" or "late films", the latter being those produced in 1920 or after. A description of the theme is usually given for the earlier films. Sound films are dealt with separately. "In subsequent editions of this catalogue, a more exact classification, will, it is hoped, be possible."

The second edition of the catalogue appeared in April 1938. In this, the first section covered the period 1896-1902, the second 1903-1911, and the third 1912-1928, with a division for those films made in 1920 or later. Sound films were in a separate section. "Each of the sections after the first is broadly sub-divided to bring films of the same kind together, and each is preceded by a brief historical note."

The Archive's collection grew so fast that by the 1950s it was necessary to have different catalogues for different parts of the collection. The first, published in 1951, was a *Catalogue of Silent News Films 1895-1933*. This was re-issued in an expanded version in 1965. The earlier edition was the first catalogue to use the cataloguing rules developed by the National Film Library. In 1960 a *Catalogue of Silent Non-Fiction Films 1895-1934* was issued, and in 1966 a *Catalogue of Silent Fiction Films 1895-1930*. In 1980, a catalogue covering all non-fiction films from 1895 to the present was published. Ernest concentrated on the silent era and on non-fiction films and newsreels, because it was more difficult to find information about these categories in other readily available printed sources. Once

the *Monthly Film Bulletin* was established, it seemed unnecessary to catalogue feature films. The Archive also produced a *Catalogue of Stills, Posters and Designs* in 1982.

The films in the above catalogues were available to scholars for study on the Archive's own premises. From the very beginning, the Archive also produced catalogues of films for loan. The first loan catalogue was in fact a section of the September 1936 *Catalogue of the National Film Library's Collection*. It was also published separately under the title *Catalogue of the National Film Library (Loan Section)*. The first loan catalogue states that "only full members of the British Film Institute may borrow films from the National Film Library for educational use by schools, institutes, bona fide educational groups or films societies". The only films associated with film history were Chaplin's *The Champion*, a compilation of early newsreels (1900-05), *The Great Train Robbery*, and five American short subjects. The rest were sponsored films, covering subjects like Geography and Travel, Industry, Public Health and Hygiene, etc.

The next catalogue I could find was dated March 1942, and titled *Catalogue of the Loan Section of the National Film Library*. Most of the films were printed from copies in the Library's Preservation Section. Ernest has often been accused of hoarding the Archive's collection and not making it available for public viewing. This catalogue belies that view. It has 23 pages, containing 57 films. Titles include Méliès' *Voyage across the Impossible*, Sarah Bernhardt in *The Lady of the Camelias*, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, *Metropolis*, *Potemkin*, *Mother*, *Kameradschaft*, *Housing Problems*, *Nanook of the North*, *Spanish Earth*, and *The Birth of a Robot*, as well as the film Cavalcanti made specially for the Library, a 12-reel compilation called *Film and Reality*, and the Marie Seton animation compilation entitled *Drawings that Walk and Talk*. The text indicating the historic importance of each film was very impressive. From the style, it looks as if it was written by Ernest himself. Most of the films were on 35mm.

Three years later, an expanded catalogue entitled *Catalogue of the Lending Section of the National Film Library* appeared. By 1946, the *National Film Library Catalogue of the Lending Section* had grown to 47 pages. It was reissued in December 1948. Most of the films were still 35mm, and the catalogues were profusely illustrated.

Sometime after 1948, the Institute set up its own Distribution Division, and John Huntley was brought in to manage it. The Archive no longer issued a lending catalogue, and I suspect all the titles in the existing catalogue were transferred to the Distribution Library.

It was the demise of the Archive's lending service that resulted in Ernest being regarded as a hoarder who did not want the Archive's films to be seen. In reality, the Distribution Library had taken over the role of the Archive Lending Section, but still got many of the films from copies in the National Film Archive. In 1971, the Archive issued its first *Catalogue of Viewing Copies*. It contained about 3,000 titles. The 1985 edition had 8,000 titles. However, these films were only available for "bona-fide study on the Archive's own premises".

### Lindgren as a writer

Another of Ernest's skills was his ability as a writer. He had a reputation for preparing several handwritten drafts of letters before sending out the final copy. They were always longer than necessary, but every word was carefully chosen to imply a particular nuance. He was extremely prolific during the war years, when he was confined to the Home Front because of his withered arm. He obviously had a lot of time to think about the future of the film archive.

In a pamphlet called *Unless We Plan Now: The Cinema*, written for the Association for Education in Citizenship probably around 1945, Ernest lists seven key reasons why the cinema is important:

- (1) The Cinematograph is a new instrument of scientific research.
- (2) The Cinematograph is a new and invaluable instrument of historical record.
- (3) It is a new educational aid for the teacher and lecturer.
- (4) It can play an important part in democratic society by giving people a fuller and more significant picture of the world in which they live than they could get by direct experience.
- (5) The cinema can do much to facilitate international understanding and, similarly, if misused, it can equally foster international misunderstanding.
- (6) The cinema is a new art form, indeed the only new art form in our time.
- (7) The cinema is a new form of entertainment.

A few years later, with the war behind him, in the January 1948 *Penguin Film Review* (No. 5), Ernest outlines his utopian archive:

"Through one side of the vestibule of a large and attractive building in the heart of the metropolis, one passes into an exhibition hall occupying an area of some 3,000 square feet. The exhibits illustrate every aspect of film production and film history. ... Attached to the exhibition hall, and accessible through it, is a small cinema of some 500 seats. Here a programme of film classics is shown three times a day. ... [Topics might include] *The Foundations of Modern Technique*, *The Realist Trend in the British Film*, *The Comedy of Chaplin* or *Films of Travel and Exploration*. ... There is a modest charge to the public for admission ... but *bona fide* students are in certain circumstances admitted at a reduced fee....

"There is a well-equipped book library and reading room.... There is a large library of stills ... for the use of the student, the author, the journalist, the lecturer and the compiler of film-strips and exhibitions. The originals never leave the Library, but ... copies can be made in an hour or two. There is a large and representative store of film scripts, and virtually all the scripts of British films, and the most important foreign ones.... The Library also has a music department, where important film-music scores are kept, ... and a collection of discs of recorded film music ... which the student can play in a sound-proof cubicle adjoining. Elsewhere in the building are other cubicles where individual students may examine films, either on a 16-mm. projector, or on a ... Moviola. Finally, there is



a small lecture hall with accommodation for some 200 people, where public lectures on various aspects of film are given from time to time....

"Contrary to general museum practice, ... the film archive need not restrict its benefits to those able to visit the archive building, but by the circulation of film prints can extend [the service] to all parts of the country.... One of the most active departments of my Utopian National Film Library, therefore, is its Lending Section. It contains 35-mm. and 16-mm. prints of all the most important films in the history of the cinema, from the earliest films of the Lumière brothers to the latest masterpiece withdrawn from commercial circulation.... The Library also has an exhibitions department where travelling exhibitions of stills, wall-charts, art designs, posters and models are prepared for circulation to museums, art galleries and libraries....

"All these are the public services that this ideal archive would perform, but we have still said nothing of the fundamental archive activity on which all this is based, namely the permanent preservation of films.... Films are chosen for preservation by a selection committee. Current commercial films selected are deposited with the archive, as books are deposited with the British Museum Library, under the terms of the Copyright Act. Private films are acquired by gift or purchase. Many films are obtained from archives abroad, either by exchange or purchase. The copies thus received are never used for projection.... The originals ... are kept in specially constructed storage vaults on a country site of several acres. The temperature and humidity in the vaults are carefully controlled, and the films are subjected to chemical tests at regular intervals to check their condition. When a copy appears unstable under test, a new copy must be made ... on cellulose acetate stock.... Beside the testing laboratory ... stands the cataloguing room, where three or four trained assistants work through the archive's new acquisitions and catalogue and index them in detail.... A careful assessment of costs indicates that such a Library could be maintained for something less than £50,000 a year, which is roughly a quarter the cost of the British Museum...."

### **To preserve and to show**

This utopian image shows that Ernest was interested in showing films and loaning them, and in the exhibition of artefacts. He turned down the Will Day Collection because the Archive could not afford it and because he had nowhere to put it, not because he thought pre-cinema and cinema artefacts weren't important. Also, during the early part of his career he was very interested in screening films. On 21 February 1936, less than a year after the Library was formed, Ernest organized a program of early silent films at the Polytechnic cinema called "Cinema 1896-1915: From Lumière to D.W. Griffith". In October 1938 the Library and others like Will Day teamed up with impresario Charles B. Cochran to present a programme at the Palace Theatre called "Flashbacks: The Evolution of the Movies 1838-1938".

When the Institute took over the Telekinema after the Festival of Britain, the Library mounted a regular program called "Fifty Years of Cinema" on Thursday and Friday evenings, and contributed to the Telekinema's

ongoing series "World Cinema". The new National Film Theatre opened in October 1952, and the Library continued its series under the title "Aspects of Film History", on Monday and Tuesday evenings, as well as making contributions to many other seasons. It was the internal struggles in the British Film Institute that occurred after Stanley Reed became Director which led to the myth that Ernest was not interested in making the Archive's collections available. Previously the Curator of the Archive had reported directly to the Board of Governors, and the Archive had its own legal identity and right to enter into agreements with film companies under its own name. The gradual diminution of these rights after Stanley Reed's arrival resulted in Ernest taking on a siege mentality.

He felt that as the Archive was the most important Division in the British Film Institute, and the one on which all the other Divisions depended, the Curator should be Director of the Institute. After he had been turned down for this position three times, and been deprived of his original role as Deputy Director, he put all his efforts into preserving the Archive's collection. He was still prepared to loan Archive films to the National Film Theatre, but he required the programme planners to give the Archive three months' notice of their requirements before the programme booklet went to press, so that the Archive could inspect the titles requested and ensure that they were of a quality and completeness that met the Archive's standards. However, programme planners seldom made decisions until the last moment, and found it easier to agree to borrow prints from more flexible archives like the Cinémathèque Française just before publication of the programme booklet, or even afterwards.

One other myth one needs to expel is that Ernest was apolitical and did not have a social conscience. The end of the Introduction he wrote to Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!* in 1951 illustrates the fallacy of this view: "*Que Viva Mexico!* and the storm of controversy it evoked are dead. Nevertheless, it is well to look on the mournful monument of what remains, to remind us that the forces which smashed Eisenstein's film are as menacing and destructive today as they ever were. Herein lies one of the fundamental problems of our age: the problem of freedom of expression in a world that threatens more and more to make it impossible. No one suffers more from this than the artist, although indirectly his loss is a loss to us all. The artist, who at his greatest is nearly always an innovator and a rebel, and a law unto himself, can fulfill his function in society only by following his own inner voice; but the growing complexity of social organization, and of modern media of expression, are more and more restrictive to the exercise of this freedom."

Ernest also realized that film would never be given the same level of support as the fine arts unless he could convince people that it was an art form in its own right. The National Film Archive brochure that was published in about 1958 is a good example of this viewpoint. The introduction begins: "To speculate on the 'ifs' of history is not always pointless. If cinematography had been invented 350 years earlier, the Elizabethans would doubtless have applied to it their pioneering zest and developed their own entertainment film industry. Documentary films would have been made of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth I, of life in her London, of the voyages of Drake and Raleigh, and of the

repulse of the Armada. If these imaginary films had survived, they would have enabled us to look back directly at the life and movement of the Elizabethan period, as we can now watch the life and movement of our day on cinema and television screens." He continues, "other works of art, other kinds of historical evidence, private papers, books, paintings, weapons, ceramics, pieces of furniture, and buildings have been preserved through the centuries by their private owners, before coming into the possession of our national museums; many indeed are still in private hands. There is no possibility that films will be preserved in this way."

In short, he stated, "Films can only be preserved permanently in the national interest by a national organization which has itself some assurance of permanence, which enjoys the confidence of the film industry, and which is endowed with the resources to bestow on its films the special technical care which their preservation requires. Herein lies the justification for the National Film Archive."

He continued this crusade until his death. In an unpublished manuscript which I believe was notes for a book on film archives, he tries another tack: "There have been four well-defined developments in human communication, but each of them has had a profound influence, more profound, one now sees in retrospect, than that of any other historical change. The first, the development of speech, divided man from animals. The second, the development of writing, separating history from prehistory and encouraging the growth of philosophy and science, marked the emergence of civilized man from primitive man. The third, the invention of printing, which provides no more, one might say, than a means of duplicating writing cheaply and mechanically, is nevertheless the foundation of our modern world, with all its immense scientific and technical achievement. In our own time there has been a fourth, clearly defined, innovation, an explosion, one may say, in human communication, that will be as far-reaching in its influences as the first three. It began with the invention of photography, and continued with the inventions of the telephone, the gramophone, radio broadcasting, the sound film, and television. These are all aspects of a gradually emerging single capability: the capability to record and to transmit across time and space, moving, living almost, facsimiles of all that we can see and all that we can hear."

### **Lindgren and FIAF**

Ernest also played a major role in the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). The National Film Library was a founder member. Olwen Vaughan, the Secretary of the British Film Institute, attended the first two Congresses in 1938 and 1939, but after the war, when Congresses recommenced, Ernest was the official representative of the Library. He was Treasurer in 1946-48, Vice President in 1948-51, 1952-54, and 1955-71, and Secretary-General in 1951-52. He served on the Executive Committee in 1954-55 and 1972-73, and was a Reserve Executive Committee member in 1971-72. Henri Langlois, Director of the Cinémathèque Française, was Secretary-General in 1946-48, 1955-57, and 1959-60. He was Vice President in 1954-55 and 1957-58, and on the Executive Committee in 1948-54, 1958-59, and 1960-61. I quote these dates because it shows that

Ernest and Henri continually exchanged positions and worked closely together, until Langlois walked out of the FIAF Congress in Stockholm in 1959, never to return.

In its early days, FIAF was mainly involved in trying to legitimize film archives and protect its members. Film production companies were obviously concerned that these new film archives were collecting films in which they owned copyright and were showing them to their constituencies. Only Ernest saw FIAF as a body that could define preservation standards and make film archives' work as valid as that of national galleries and museums. This is why he was so concerned with procedures, and stuck grimly to the idea that a print could never be projected until a preservation master of the title had been made. Existing museums had similar rules for safeguarding their collections, and if film archives were to receive the same respect, they would have to follow their lead.

As Penelope Houston reports in her book *Keepers of the Frame*, Ernest complained that too many archives had a stamp collector's mentality, and were swapping among themselves inferior copies of classic films rather than making an effort to get the best copies available. Not only were Lindgren's and Langlois's temperaments as different as chalk and cheese, they wanted FIAF to concentrate on different objectives. Jacques Ledoux, the curator of the Cinémathèque Royale in Brussels, summed up Langlois as follows: "He was a man of excess in all things, but fascinating in his very excesses, an extraordinary mixture of inspiration and preconceived ideas, of generosity and jealousy." Langlois believed passionately that an archive's role was to put film on the screen. Lindgren believed with equal conviction that the role of an archive was to ensure that the films in its collection were preserved for posterity. It was unfortunately easier to make fun of Ernest by saying that the initials N.F.A. stood for "no film available" or that "his posterity would never come", than to criticize Langlois for showing films his constituency wanted to see even though he was destroying them in the process.

Ernest spent a lot of time trying to make FIAF work, but when one reads the letters he wrote (in English) to Langlois, one can see how they would have upset a man who kept all the details of his collection in his mind or on scraps of flimsy paper, and who had a paranoid belief that everyone was trying to destroy him. Here is an example, from a letter addressed to "My dear Langlois", on 21 May 1948: "You say that it is customary for the texts accompanying the agenda to be distributed to the delegates at the beginning of the sessions of the conference. I know that it has been customary in Paris, but if you will allow me to say so, I don't think it is a good procedure, since it does not give the delegates any time at all to consider the texts beforehand. That is why I suggested to you that they should be circulated beforehand. If they are not so circulated I shall feel bound to make a protest at the conference and put forward a resolution for the vote of the conference that in future all the texts shall be circulated with the agenda in advance of any meeting."

When Langlois walked out of the Stockholm Congress in 1959, Lindgren took a lot of effort to persuade him to return, even going so far as to write a personal letter in French to Henri's home address. Langlois never

came back, and the Cinémathèque Française did not become a full member of the Federation again until 1991.

Interestingly, when the FIAF Code of Ethics was adopted in 1998, it represented a compromise which was a distillation of the point of view of both Lindgren and Langlois: "Film archives recognize that their primary commitment is to preserve the materials in their care and – provided always that such activity will not compromise this commitment – to make them permanently available for research study and public screening."

Today, most film archivists recognize that if Ernest Lindgren and Harold Brown had not created the archival infrastructure now utilized by film archives all over the world, our cinema heritage would be a random selection of worn prints in the hands of private film collectors, rather than a secure body of work that can accurately represent the art of world cinema and the history of the 20th century. Alas, the published word is difficult to dispel, and Henri Langlois is still seen by many as the father of the film archive movement. He may have been its greatest showman, but the role of the movement's visionary, and eventual saviour, belongs to Ernest Lindgren, ably assisted by his brilliant technical officer, Harold Brown.



Harold Brown (second from the left) and his colleagues in early years.